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Special Thematic Section on "The Social Psychology of Citizenship, Participation and Social Exclusion"

'Flying While Muslim': Citizenship and Misrecognition in the Airport

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Abstract

Contemporary analyses of citizenship emphasise the importance of being able to occupy public space in a manner that does not compromise one's sense of self. Moreover, they foreground individuals' active engagement with others (e.g., being concerned about others) and the active exercise of one's rights. We explore such issues through considering the psychological and social significance of having one's various self-definitions mis-recognised in everyday social interactions. We do so through reporting interview and focus group data obtained from Scottish Muslims concerning their experience of surveillance at airports. Focussing on their accounts of how they orient to others' assumptions about Muslim passengers, we consider what this means for our participants' ability to act on terms that they recognise as their own and for their citizenship behaviours. Our analysis is organised in two sections. First, we examine the strategies people use to avoid painful encounters inside the airport. These include changes in micro-behaviours designed to avert contact, and where this was not possible, identity performances that are, in various ways, inauthentic. Second, we examine citizenship-related activities and how these may be curtailed in the airport. These include activities that entail the individual reaching out and making positive connections with others (e.g., through helping others) and exercising the right to criticise and complain about one's treatment. Our analyses highlight the psychological and social consequence of identity misrecognition, and how this impacts on individuals' abilities to act in terms of their own valued identifications and enact citizenship behaviours.

Keywords: everyday citizenship, identity, surveillance, misrecognition, airports, Muslims

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"if citizenship is to mean anything in an everyday sense it should mean the ability of individuals to occupy public spaces in a manner that does not compromise their self-identity, let alone obstruct, threaten or even harm them more materially."
(Painter & Philo, 1995, p. 115)

The concept of citizenship has traditionally been tied to the individual's relationship to the polity, usually the nation state. From the time of ancient Greece, the central concern has been who belongs (and who is excluded); and what are the rights and obligations entailed. From an early focus on civil rights (e.g., freedom of speech, the right

to hold property) and political rights (e.g., the right to vote), the concept of citizenship has expanded to include a range of social rights (e.g., access to education and welfare) necessary for the realisation of the former (Marshall, 1950). In recent years, conceptions of citizenship have expanded further to address the *recognition* of social groups (Isin & Turner, 2002). In part this has been prompted by issues of cultural diversity which have brought to the fore a latent tension between ‘the singular identity implied by citizenship’ and ‘the actuality of a plurality of social identities’ (Purvis & Hunt, 1999, p. 458). Our opening quote from Painter and Philo (1995) nicely captures this expanded notion of citizenship. Moreover, it captures the notion that whilst the legal conferral of citizenship may be a prerequisite for enjoying the status of citizenship, it is not sufficient. Citizenship is imagined here as a social and political practice whereby individuals and groups claim and contest the recognition of valued identities through their everyday interactions (Lister, 1997).

In this paper we build on recent social psychological contributions to understanding the psychological and social significance of identity recognition in citizenship (Barnes, Auburn, & Lea, 2004; Di Masso, 2012; Gibson & Hamilton, 2011; Gray & Griffin, 2014). More specifically we examine the importance of having one’s various self-definitions recognised and respected in public spaces and how this can be consequential for one’s citizenship behaviours. Although there is a vast legal, sociological, and philosophical literature that theorises citizenship, there is less empirical work exploring people’s own construals and experiences of citizenship in their everyday lives (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003). Drawing on research examining British Muslims’ negotiations of identity and belonging in airports, we show how a social psychological understanding of identity recognition can be directly relevant for some of the activities often seen as integral to active ‘citizenship’ such as civic participation (e.g., civility, helping others) and rights-claiming. In so doing, we also illustrate how social psychological theorizing may be enriched through examining minority perspectives in everyday social interactions occurring in what Dixon and colleagues (2005) refer to as the “messy, ambivalent (...) arenas of everyday life” (p. 709).

Place and Surveillance

Di Masso (2012) describes public spaces as “the natural arena of citizenship” (p. 123) in both a political and a psychological sense. They are often places of surveillance and control, regulating who does and who does not belong, and what rights and freedoms people may claim (Hopkins & Dixon, 2006). This is well-illustrated in young people’s experiences when ‘doing nothing’ on the streets (Gray & Manning, 2014). It is also well-illustrated in sociological studies of minority group members’ experiences. For example, Feagin’s (1991) research conducted with middle-class Black Americans provides a rich account of their experience of surveillance and suspicion in America’s shopping malls, and of how this impacted on such apparently mundane activities as shopping (such that middle-class Black Americans found it necessary to ‘wear their class identity’ so as to warrant their presence in such malls). Research shows that there is a basis for such concerns: shop assistants do indeed pay Black shoppers particular attention (captured in the catchy phrase ‘shopping while black’; Gabbidon, 2003). These experiences – often humiliating and recurrent – are psychologically draining and, given the history of formal segregation in the US, are understood by many Black Americans as a violation of civil rights fought for and won; specifically, the right to equal participation in ‘public accommodations’ (Civil Rights Act, 1964). Moreover, these experiences testify to the psychological importance of having one’s sense of who one is recognised and validated: without this, one is constrained to act on terms that are not one’s own and to feel publicly devalued and disrespected.

Our own research focuses on Scottish Muslims’ experiences of encounters with authorities in public places (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). This research identifies airports as one site where Muslims

experience hyper-surveillance by authorities. There are particular advantages in taking airports as a research site. The fact that airports can be ports of entry makes the issue of borders – and thus questions of identity and legally-defined citizenship – formally salient for all. Moreover, people returning from overseas trips may judge the airport and their passage through it as symbolically significant and as marking their return 'home' (Hopkins, Reicher, & Harrison, 2006). Thus airport surveillance (and the threat of misrecognition that it entails) has particular significance. To find one's identity questioned at precisely the time when one is happy to be 'home' can be a painful experience in which all manner of taken-for-granted assumptions about one's self are challenged by others' suspicions as to who one 'really' is. All these issues are particularly prominent for Muslims as concerns about terrorism have resulted in airports being sites of hyper-surveillance with British Muslim travellers experiencing increased attention (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011). Indeed, another catchy phrase – 'flying while Muslim' – has now entered the lexicon to describe the problematic experience of undertaking what for others is a more routine activity.

Previous research shows that Muslim travellers find the experience of airport surveillance distressing and as entailing a form of identity misrecognition (Blackwood et al., 2013a). Moreover, this research lends two additional insights. First, whilst the starting point for that research was an interest in the experience of surveillance from authorities, respondents had a sense that the wider airport community including airport businesses and other travellers were similarly engaged in the practice of surveillance. This finds echoes in analyses of counter-terrorism policing, and stop and search practices (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011; Kundnani, 2009; Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009) which suggest that the authorities' role is double. First, their practices directly impact minorities. Second, their practices are indirectly consequential because they communicate to a broader community who does and does not belong and thus contribute to a process of community-wide 'othering'.

Second, close analysis revealed that this misrecognition did not simply problematize people's national identity, but a range of identities which they valued and saw as entirely compatible with popular notions of being a 'good citizen' (e.g., as law-abiding, responsible, respectable, liberal-minded, community-orientated). It also entailed the misrecognition of their Muslim identity which they saw as a source of morality and inclusion in British society, but was defined instead as alien and dangerous. Thus, whilst national identities may possess particular qualities consonant with the notion of citizenship (Sindic, 2011), other identities may also be contextually implicated. Where one finds that one's Britishness is not something that can be taken for granted, then other aspects of one's self-definition are also compromised (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011).

Below we contribute to the analysis of citizenship through exploring how British Muslims' experience of identity misrecognition affects their behaviour, and what this means for their ability to participate and enact some of the behaviours associated with citizenship. In addressing these issues we take seriously Painter and Philo's (1995) emphasis on the importance of people being able to "occupy public spaces in a manner that does not compromise their self-identity". Specifically, we ask if one's self-definition is indeed compromised, then how do people occupy those spaces, and with what consequences?

Identity and Misrecognition

As identities can be conceptualised in essentialist terms, the concept of recognition has been criticised because it can imply that people have a single coherent identity that they are motivated to express across diverse contexts (Sen, 2006, 2008). This is both politically problematic and psychologically misleading. From the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), people hold personal and

social identities which are more or less central to their sense of self in a given context. The self is not fixed, but is multiple, variable and context-dependent, and others' recognition of one's self-conception is psychologically crucial. That is to say, how one self-defines and experiences one's identities at any moment does not depend simply on one's own psychological commitments. It also depends on how others (particularly powerful others) categorize us and treat us. Indeed, if we are to speak of a person as 'having an identity' it is important that others treat that person as having that identity (Jenkins, 1996) and if they do not, their subjective experience is significantly affected (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Wakefield et al., 2011). For instance, whilst it is important for an academic that others recognize them as such when giving a conference paper, the same person would be disconcerted if they were approached as an academic at the beach or at a concert (and vice versa). Thus, what is critical is how others orient to us and the degree to which they behave towards us in terms that accord with our own self-conception in that context. It is this that impacts directly on one's ability to be oneself in public places.

Social psychological research has much to offer in elaborating the nature and consequences of misrecognition and the experience of categorization threat when others do not see us as we see ourselves (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003). Such misrecognition has been shown to take a number of forms including having one's membership of a valued group denied (e.g., Cheryan & Monin, 2005) and being seen in terms of one category when one would prefer to be seen in terms of another (Barreto, Ellemers, Scholten, & Smith, 2010; e.g., being seen as Muslim when one wishes to be seen as British). Moreover, given the interpenetration of identities (such that for the individual concerned they are mutually constitutive), the misrecognition of one's Britishness may not simply deny one's sense of national belonging but also one's understanding of Islam and one's Muslim identity – e.g., as having a universal quality that allows local hybridization (Hopkins, 2011).

More generally, these experiences of identity denial and misrecognition have been shown to be associated with diminished self-worth, depression, and powerlessness (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007); reduced commitment to the group and withdrawal of effort (Tyler & Blader, 2003); as well as motivation to gain acceptance through greater effort towards group goals (Sleebos, Ellemers, & de Gilder, 2006) and the performance of identity (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013). The key insight from this research is the importance of meta-perceptions – minority group members' beliefs about how majority group members perceive them. Indeed, research shows that power is inversely related to perspective-taking (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006) and that those without power are particularly sensitive to, and affected by, what they think members of other groups think about them (Lammers, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008). Moreover, minority group members' meta-perceptions of what the authorities think about them may be particularly consequential because minority groups believe that authorities' actions both influence and reflect wider majority community attitudes (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Talbot & Böse, 2007). As previously noted, this was precisely the concern expressed by Muslim participants in our research whose anxieties about misrecognition in airports extended to their fellow travellers (Blackwood et al., 2013a, 2013b).

The above research provides valuable insights into the antecedents to majority-minority interactions (e.g., anxiety due to previous experiences and expectations) and to how minority group members' beliefs about how their group is seen by majority group members shape their performance of their identities (e.g., how Muslim hijab-wearing women anticipating a mis-categorisation as 'foreign' perform their Scottishness; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013). What is beginning to receive more attention is how such concerns limit interaction.

Managing Majority-Minority Interactions in a Public Space

There are many studies that can shed light on both the experience of misrecognition and its consequences for how people manage their interactions. For instance, research shows that when minority group members believe that dominant group members regard the minority group in negative terms, they feel anxious and cautious about future interaction (Shelton & Richeson, 2006; Shelton, Richeson, & Salvatore, 2005) and avoid contact (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002). Such concerns are likely to be especially potent where people feel powerless and ineffectual (Lammers et al., 2008). For instance, in their research on African Americans' experiences of everyday 'racial micro-aggressions' (e.g., recurrent indignities, unfair treatment, and hyper-surveillance), Smith and colleagues (2007) provide a rich account of the sense of being 'out of place' and of not fitting others' description of a legitimate community member. Coining the phrase 'racial battle fatigue', they describe a psychological state in which the environment is judged stressful with individuals experiencing heightened self-consciousness and hyper-vigilance, a sense of ambiguity and loss of control, all of which affects their confidence to appear in public. Needless to say the parallels with research on the experiences of 'shopping while black' are striking (especially with regard to the emotional burden of interpreting oftentimes ambiguous social environments).

The cumulative effects of the above are clear in research that documents how despite official support for equality between majority and minority groups, minority groups have participated in the re-segregation of neighbourhoods, workplaces, and social networks through informal processes of intergroup avoidance (e.g., Darden & Kamel, 2000; Davis, 2004; Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2010; Massey & Denton, 1992). Thus, it is not just majority group members who retreat from newly 'integrated' public spaces; minorities also do so and establish alternative 'safe spaces' where social recognition and acceptance are more easily accomplished (see Hooks, 1990).

Research also shows that even when public space is occupied by various groups, informal segregation often occurs. Whether on buses (Davis, Seibert, & Breed, 1966); in university cafeterias (Clack, Dixon, & Tredoux, 2005), school dining rooms (Al Ramiah, Schmid, Hewstone, & Floe, 2015), or beaches (Durrheim & Dixon, 2005), people manage to organise a degree of segregation. For instance, Durrheim and Dixon's (2005) study found that out of an observed 503 instances of intergroup interaction on a beach in South Africa, there were a paltry 12 mixed-race encounters. This minimal contact in one of the most relaxed of settings was achieved by both black and white beachgoers curtailing their opportunities for interaction through the organization of collective 'umbrella' spaces, and through the timing of their collective arrivals and departures.

Yet, there are circumstances where interactions between majority and minority group members do occur. The question, then, is how do people experience and manage these interactions? Research suggests that where contact with majority group members is unavoidable, minority group members may show low levels of intimacy-building behaviour and reduced disclosure (e.g., Cook, Arrow, & Malle, 2011; Vorauer, 2005). When those they are interacting with are authority figures (e.g. the police) the result is often reduced co-operation (Murphy & Cherney, 2011; Tyler, 2007). These adaptations to the social context are not without psychological cost. Indeed, research shows that the feeling of inauthenticity that arises when one cannot express aspects of one's self-concept can result in psychological distress and reduced well-being (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Kraus, Chen, & Keltner, 2011; Shelton et al., 2005).

Such a catalogue paints a picture of physical and psychological withdrawal. But what is not clear is what these behaviours mean to those whose negative expectations and fear of misrecognition precipitates their retreat. Durrheim and Dixon's (2005) research hints at this. Of note, they found that although both black and white

beachgoers participated in the informal segregation of the beach, their frameworks for understanding their actions were quite different. Whilst white beachgoers saw themselves responding to black pushiness and invasion of their space, black beachgoers saw their inclusion on the beach following years of exclusion as a source of delight, and lamented that they were unable to fully enjoy this because whites appeared to be “running away” (p. 169). That is to say, black beachgoers felt constrained in their ability to enjoy their hard won citizenship and to act as full community members in the manner they wished.

Our Research

In our research we explored Scottish Muslims’ accounts of (mis)recognition in the public space of the airport. In many respects, airports may be regarded as a special case; a public space *par excellence* for examining the legal recognition of citizenship (and non-citizenship). Indeed, they are one of the few places where the question of one’s legal citizenship status is made explicit through the requirement to produce documentation when passing through border control and immigration. As noted above, given contemporary concerns about terrorism, airports are also places where more informal processes impacting on the (mis)recognition of identities and hence citizenship may be in evidence. Indeed, research has found that surveillance in airports – particularly when coming home – can be understood by some as an explicit denial of their Britishness, not simply in a legal sense, but in a deeply personal sense where people feel cast out from the group (Blackwood et al., 2013a, 2013b). Moreover, people were distressed by the identities (e.g., as disreputable and dangerous) ascribed to them. Here we build on this research to examine the consequences of misrecognition for how people behave and the interactional strategies people employ in the airport; and what this then means for people’s ability to act as citizens in terms which affirm their identities.

Method

Participants

We interviewed 38 British Muslims recruited in three Scottish cities (Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow), through a range of organizations (e.g., an Islamic student society, a Muslim youth group, Mosques, and a women’s centre) and through requesting those we interviewed to recommend others to contact. Our sample included businesspeople, home makers, professionals and students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia). Some were born in the UK, and all were residents who self-identified as British. Thirty-two participants were male and 6 were female. The youngest participant was 19 and the oldest was in his sixties. The gender, age and, where known, the occupation of interviewees cited below are provided in [Appendix](#).

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted 30 minutes to 3 hours; one focus group lasted 2 hours and the other 4 hours. Twenty-four were interviewed alone, a mother and daughter were interviewed together, and 12 were interviewed in two groups of six. The use of group interviews is commonplace in research on minority groups, as is the decision to report data from individual and group interviews together (see [Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013](#)). Moreover, the fact that we have individual and group interviews has advantages. Whereas an interview with a single interviewee allows for more in-depth probing of an individual’s views, group interviews provide a context in which participants can compare and contrast their experiences. This can be useful for bringing out differences

in perspective or in giving one confidence that what is said in a one-to-one interview is not simply a function of that context but also arises when others are present. All interviews were conducted by the first author (a white, non-Muslim Australian woman) and took place in people's homes, community centres and Mosques. Whilst there may be merit in the interviewer being Muslim, there are also disadvantages associated with the interviewer being seen as sharing the same identity as one's respondents (see [Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009](#)). Most obviously, insiders are assumed to share common knowledge and hence to ask certain questions would seem strange and awkward. Moreover, interviewees can be less willing to elaborate upon their understandings and experiences because they assume the questioner already knows the answer.

We were careful not to presuppose what, if any, forms of contact with authorities were troublesome for our participants. We started all interviews by inviting people to tell stories about memorable encounters they or others had with authorities:

We are interested in the kinds of interactions, both good and bad, that people are having with authorities. I want you to just tell stories about interactions that made some impression on you. You can tell as many stories as you like about experiences with anybody who you perceive as having authority in society.

We asked people to be as detailed as possible and where appropriate probed for additional information: What were the circumstances? Who was there? What was said and done? In asking for stories, we were not concerned with the objective reality of people's experiences, but with how people made sense of these experiences. Often participants' story-telling entailed considerable reflection on their emotions and their thought processes. Where this was not the case, we probed further.

Although participants referred to various sites of interaction, airports throughout the UK and internationally were consistently identified as public spaces where people felt compromised in how they were seen and how in turn they could act. Contributing to this was the experience of being stopped on many occasions and sometimes at multiple points within the one trip, and indeed the one airport (e.g., check-in, passport control, security, departure lounge, boarding, immigration, baggage, and customs). This was viewed as signalling that the basis for one's treatment was ethnic and religious profiling. In the words of one participant: "I should play the lottery because by this probability I get pulled aside every time. But the point is, we all get stopped" (Interviewee 9). Whilst in some instances people's story-telling focussed on a specific experience in one location, quite often it drew on multiple experiences and moved between the specific and the more generic experience of occupying an airport space.

Analytic Procedure

Following [Braun and Clarke \(2006, 2012\)](#), we conducted a thematic analysis in which coding proceeded through an iterative process. Once we identified airports as the specific site of interest, we defined our data set as those sections of the interviews related to these sites. Readings of this data set focused on identifying repeated patterns of meaning around people's understanding of how they were regarded by others in the airport space and how they were able to act in the airport. While we looked for identity-related issues we did not limit ourselves to these themes. Our coding and the development of themes proceeded through an iterative process of reading and re-reading the data set. As far as possible we kept to the explicit meaning our participants gave the experience ([Boyatzis, 1998](#)).

Findings

Inevitably, participants' responses to their airport experiences were complex. Many appreciated the need for security and understood that, at some level, they too benefited from such security. Yet, their direct experience of the authorities' gaze and of multiple stops could be concerning, for as one of our participants (Interviewee 23) put it, "you shouldn't have to answer and be answerable for going about your daily business". Moreover, this was compounded by the gaze of other occupants in the airport space (e.g., fellow travellers and shop-keepers). Our analysis takes as its focus this experience of scrutiny in the airport context and considers what it means for those interested in the social psychology of citizenship.

Our analysis is organised in two sections. In the first, we examine our interviewees' reports of strategies to minimise encounters inside the airport. Broadly speaking, these strategies took one of two forms: to withdraw and avoid all physical contact with others occupying that space (i.e., authorities, shop-keepers, and fellow travellers); and where this was not possible, to protect oneself through an inauthentic identity performance. In the second section we examine our interviewees' reports of curtailing two modes of civic engagement identified by [Haste and Hogan \(2006\)](#) – helping and voicing one's views. The first includes those activities that entail the individual reaching out and making positive connections with fellow-citizens (e.g., through helping others). The second includes those activities that entail exercising one's rights to criticise and complain.

Section 1: Strategies to Minimize Encounters

The most extreme strategy reported by those anxious about interactions in airports was to avoid the airport altogether. Some also spoke of avoiding particular airports, travelling less frequently than before, or at least thinking more carefully about when and where to travel. For instance, one respondent observed: "I still want to go to Disneyworld, but I'll be honest with you. I don't want to go through all that hassle [being stopped at airports]" (Interviewee 9). Avoiding airports can of course place limits on people's enjoyment of life and their full economic and social participation in society. For the most part, our interviewees had not stopped air travel but spoke instead of their attempts to avoid attention and so minimize the potential for negative interactions with authorities and fellow-travellers.

One common response entailed avoiding others' gaze. Thus, this male businessperson explained:

Extract 1

Interviewee 9: I mean one of the things about the airport; you know we talked about what happens typically when I go through security and after security. You go through the police to the desk there, and there will be like four or five, four or three members of the police there. You'll be walking by, all eyes will be on you, all four, you don't know where to look. If you think, making eye contact they might pull you aside, it's just a strange thing, really strange. You should try it. Next time you go to an airport, try to walk by without looking at them.

There is arguably nothing more fundamental to human connection than meeting another's gaze; what Goffman describes as "the most direct and purest reciprocity anywhere" ([Goffman, 1963](#), p. 93). In an airport context it is easy to imagine that establishing connection might not be uppermost in one's mind. Rather, what one might hope for is to be accorded what [Goffman \(1963\)](#) terms 'civil inattention' where others' eyes pass over you without lingering or betraying too much interest. Yet instead, what is described above is hyper-vigilance to people's stares;

according to Goffman, a decidedly *uncivil* form of attention that breaks this convention. Moreover, we see the psychological effort to avert that gaze; something that is clearly easier said than accomplished.

Of course the experience of not knowing where to look when there are lots of police around is not peculiar to Muslims; it may be familiar to many of us and arises from similar fears that we might be misrecognized as disreputable. But as we will see, for Muslims the experience is more chronic and it is linked specifically to the understanding that it is one's Muslim identity that renders one suspect. For instance, the effort to avoid attention (and indeed any ensuing interaction) was not just about avoiding gaze; it was apparent in people's adjustments of other micro-behaviours too. The following is taken from a focus group conducted with six men of varying ages at a mosque. Here, a young male student (Interviewee 15) described how he modified his gaze, his gait, and what he carried:

Extract 2

Interviewee 15: I will change the way I look at people. I will try and kind of avoid eye contact with staff at the airport, at the duty free department, or things like that. The way I walk, how I carry my bag. What I carry with me.

Interviewer: How do you walk? How do you carry your bag? What do you have to do?

Interviewee 15: Don't forget there's cameras everywhere. So they're looking out for anything slightly suspicious, [jumble of voices]¹ if you're looking around like this and this, they stop you.

Echoing the concerns of Interviewee 9, this young man was clear that he was subject to scrutiny and that his strategy was to strive for invisibility and slip through, unnoticed and psychologically untouched. At first glance, such micro-behavioural adjustments may appear trivial. But there are two respects in which they are commensurate with a retreat from citizenship. First, in striving for invisibility from those with whom one shares public space, the potential for social interaction that builds bridges and bonds communities is limited. Indeed, the effect is to segregate. Second, in the ensuing interview exchange (involving this interviewee and two others) it becomes clear that it is not simply physical retreat that is at stake, but psychological retreat. That is, it is clear that what is at issue for these protagonists is the question of whether one can behave authentically in terms of a valued identity:

Extract 3

Interviewee 20: My advice is be yourself. Be yourself. You've got nothing to hide. The only reason why people are getting nervous and anxious is in case they do this or do that. And that's what they're looking for. They're looking for body language. What I would say is be yourself. Be yourself. You've got nothing to hide. It's their problem not yours. Be yourself. Go through security, take off your wristwatch, take off your belt. Do what you need to do and just go through.

Interviewee 18: The thing is, some individuals might have been themselves and then had to go through problems. Maybe that's the reason why they started to change their attitudes.

Interviewee 15: I was being myself and then after that (reference to negative experience) it's like (...) If I'm wearing like my jeans, tracksuit, anything else, they don't stop me. If I'm wearing salwar kameez, more beard, and that kind of stuff, I'm stopped.

Here Interviewees 18 and 15 queried whether one can – as Interviewee 20 put it – “be yourself”. Indeed, they argued one could not and this takes us to the insight in much contemporary citizenship research that fundamental to being regarded as a citizen (and being able to regard oneself as such) is the ability for people to be present in public spaces without compromising their self-identity. Moreover, this exchange captures something of the complexity to people's thinking about their performances. Whereas two of our interviewees (nos. 15 and 18) suggest that

modifying one's public presentation could help avoid attention, the other (Interviewee 20) suggests that worrying about what others think (and trying to modify your public presentation) runs the risk of attracting even more attention. In other words, even Interviewee 20's account reveals much about the difficulties experienced at the airport. His suggestion that you should "be yourself" does not arise from the judgement that the airport context is risk-free. Rather, it arises from his judgement that one's behaviour will indeed be subject to intense scrutiny and that trying to present oneself in any other way is likely to entail behaviour that will draw yet more attention. That is, his suggestion to "be yourself" is not based on any appraisal of the environment as one free of surveillance and a lack of preconceptions about Muslims and their identities. Nor is it based on an appraisal of the environment as being stress-free (such that it is easy to "be yourself"). Rather, it is based on an appraisal of the risks of attempting an inauthentic performance (where one tries to hide one's identity).

In saying that people felt discomfort in the airport and felt unable to be themselves, the question arises as to what sort of 'self' was it that they felt was compromised (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011). Or to put this in another way, who or what self is one (not) able to be? From the extract above it is clear that Interviewee 15 feels he could safely present himself in the manner of a quintessential young British male; but to present himself as a devout Muslim was potentially costly ("If I'm wearing like my jeans, tracksuit, anything else, they don't stop me. If I'm wearing *salwar kameez*, more beard, and that kind of stuff, I'm stopped"). Thus, he was faced with a dilemma which forced him to disavow his religious identity. Indeed, as the interview progressed, he observed that "I'm a religious person and I'm wearing my clothes and so if I know they're going to stop me because of that, do I change myself? I'm a religious person".

In the public space of the airport (where one's identity as Muslim can potentially be misrecognized as constituting an alien threat) several remarked on the concealment of one's religious identity. For instance, here a female homemaker described a friend who changed what she wears:

Extract 4

Interviewee 12: When she goes travelling she takes the niqab off, she just wears the hijab because she doesn't feel comfortable wearing the niqab anymore.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Interviewee 12: Because she knows people look at her like, yeah OK, she's the scary one. So she just travels with the hijab. She's actually stopped wearing the niqab.

Two features of such experiences are noteworthy. The first is that the identity that is compromised is not one that is merely incidental and can easily be cast aside; it is a religious identity that we might expect to be central to this woman's self-concept. However, in the airport context, others' orientation to this valued identity to the exclusion of all others is painful and doubly so because the perception of Muslims is crude and negative ("yeah OK, she's the scary one"). The second feature of note is the loss of spontaneity in her expression of identity; a quality of social relations that is the mark of authenticity and the privilege of belonging, feeling recognized, and of being 'at ease'. This woman needs to consider carefully whether or not to wear particular markers of her religious identity and risk drawing negative attention to herself. Thus, these responses cannot be described as the 'free choice' of equal citizens who need only consult their own personal preferences. Rather, these are carefully considered responses made in response to the perception of a hostile environment where one is regarded as a threat.

Thus, we observe hyper-vigilance about the potential for misrecognition and how this results in behaviour choreographed to allay other people's fears; what [Mythen, Walklate, and Khan \(2009\)](#) describe as the 'performance of safety'. Moreover, such performances require considerable effort for as one interviewee (no. 9) explained "I have to go out of my way and do everything in a manner that shows I'm not a threat to anyone". When asked "Okay, how do you do that?" he continued that he would ensure that he could not possibly set off any security alarm:

Extract 5

Interviewee 9: How do I do that? Well, I don't know. It's difficult, you try not to look suspicious [inaudible]. But you, you're also made to feel guilty as well when you're at the airport because everyone is looking at you. So what I try and do is make sure, like for example, the metal detectors they'll beep because I've got coins in my pocket and I know that would make me even more embarrassed and you know, it'll just put more focus on me, yeah?

Others explained that in order to avoid attention they concealed other aspects of their identity. For example, the same individual who urged Interviewee 15 to be himself (Extract 3 above) commented at a later point in the focus group discussion:

Extract 6

Interviewee 20: You know when I travel because of all this I've changed my antics completely. For example, I've got dual nationality. I make sure I don't travel dual nationality, I travel with one passport. What I do, for example, my credit cards, you know I've got a wallet full of them. There's no way I would take a wallet full of credit cards. I just take one or two I'm going to use and maybe one extra. ID – I will only take one piece of ID. So I keep it very simple so it means there are less questions.

A key feature of this example is again the degree of anticipation and consideration even before entering the airport. His explanation hints at the considerable thought about what to take, but also, and perhaps more importantly, what identity-relevant markers (his 'ID' documents) to leave behind. What is also striking is that this individual's status as a mature, successful, contributing citizen is neither something he can take for granted nor something that confers advantages upon him. In order not to draw attention to himself and to limit the grounds for interaction if he is stopped, he presents *only* his British identity and he refrains from expressing his dual nationality and other aspects of his identity (including his material success). He is clear about his purpose in doing so – he keeps it "simple" so there will be "less questions". Thus, we see that people are not just constrained in their ability to express their Muslim identity; the expression of many aspects of one's identity may become problematic, again underlining the sense that one cannot simply be oneself.

It would be misleading to suggest that all our participants sought to modify their identity performances. However, if they did not, it was not always because they judged the airport risk-free. As we have seen, Interviewee 20 (Extract 3) advised people to "be yourself" because the alternative was actually harder (and would attract more attention). Still others reported viewing potentially negative encounters at the airport as an opportunity to claim and assert their citizenship. For example, in response to the discussion reported in Extract 3, one older male observed:

Extract 7

Interviewee 19: I don't change anything. If anything, I'm kind of hoping someone will do something because I want to make a complaint and make a scene. I don't know, that's terrible. But no, I don't change. Mind you, I've not had any of the experiences that he's had (referring to Interviewee 15).

As should be apparent, although this individual reports "I don't change anything", this was not out of a calm equanimity for his fate. Rather, he described his behaviour as a challenge to the authorities to accept him on his

own terms. That is, there is a sense in which he reports wanting the authorities to handle the encounter poorly so that he can “make a complaint and make a scene”. Thus, in being himself and not changing, he neither anticipates nor wishes for an authentic interaction based on mutual recognition of the ‘good’ citizen. Indeed, there is a sense in which his identity performance is inauthentic for as his explanation makes clear, he is only too well aware of the insincerity of his motives in not changing “anything”. One implication of this analysis is that once identity is problematized and one cannot depend on being treated on one’s own terms, any stance one takes becomes a calculated performance and is therefore potentially inauthentic.

Thus far, our discussion has considered the ways in which people’s meta-perceptions of how others’ view them result in various identity performances in which valued identities are not expressed (or are expressed in the form of defiance). In particular we noted how participants reported performances of identity designed to render themselves less visibly Muslim (Mythen et al., 2009). Moreover, we noted that these performances are by no means straightforward; they are difficult to accomplish in part because there is frequently ambivalence about how one can and should act. The result is avoidance of interaction and a sense that when interaction does occur it is inauthentic and not on one’s own terms; an experience linked with reduced well-being and life satisfaction (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Thus, these reported experiences can be seen as evidence that these individuals’ occupation of public space comes at a price. With regards to the expression of identity it entails a degree of compromise and inauthenticity. In the section below, we explore the implications of this for the performance of various behaviours that are often seen as the behaviours we associate with citizenship.

Section 2: Curtailing Citizenship Behaviours

We now consider the implications of this desire to avoid attention for two key elements of citizenship behaviour in everyday life. The first is the idea that to be a good citizen is to contribute to the community through pro-social acts. The second is the idea that citizens exercise ‘voice’ and claim their rights. Both sets of activities entail participation in the life of a community, and we consider how they are curtailed in the airport (and how this itself reflects people’s fears of misrecognition).

Section 2a: Citizenship Activity: Connecting with Others and Pro-Social Behaviour

The tension between, on the one hand, a desire to interact with others, and on the other, a desire to protect oneself from others’ judgements, permeated many of our interviews. For example, it is reflected in one man’s regret (Interviewee 9) that he can’t be light-hearted where “any sort of joke about planes or anything like that can be construed in the complete opposite way”. But, it is not just joking about planes that he found risky:

Extract 8

Interviewee 9: Even little things, like minor things. You’re in the queue. I like to see the funny things in life, right? And you can’t joke and you can’t really chat with people in the queue while you’re waiting for security because they just don’t want to be associated with you.

Here he explained that he felt the option of simply ‘chatting’ and ‘joking’ with others had been closed down. Moreover, he explained that this was not necessarily his choice. Rather, he attributed his reticence to others’ perceptions of him (in a security setting) as someone who they would not wish to be associated with. Moreover, he explained he understood their reticence and it was this that accounted for his behaviour. Thus, the consequence of his understanding of others’ concerns is that interaction is restricted. He continued to explain that this restriction extends to the informal segregation of space – even to the level of impacting the occupation of seats on the plane:

Extract 9

Interviewee 9: When I'm looking for a seat, people are a bit nervous to sit next to me or nervous for me to sit next to them. And it is always my seat that is the last one to be taken, and it seems like that, and I can understand people's fears, yeah?

Of course we cannot know whether any one instance of striking up a conversation with a stranger in a queue or choosing to sit next to someone on a plane would result in meaningful exchanges. However, whilst each of these small instances of contact avoidance may be inconsequential on their own, collectively they signal lost opportunities for the kinds of productive social relations that strengthen a community.

This point is perhaps more clearly and powerfully made when we consider a circumstance which according to [Goffman \(1963\)](#) nullifies the implied risks of engagement between the unacquainted: that is to say, the event of an emergency. Thus, this interviewee (no. 9) continued to explain that even where intervening in situations would be entirely appropriate, he would be unlikely to do so because of how he thought others would view him. For example, he explained that there were now circumstances where if he saw trouble of any sort (e.g., an argument on a plane), he would no longer follow his instincts to volunteer his help and intervene for fear of finding himself the centre of attention. As he put it:

Extract 10

Interviewee 9: It's always at the back of your mind, if something goes wrong, there's a bit of a ... like on the airplane there's a disagreement I can't get involved, because if I get involved, the focus would be on me then.

In other words, this individual not only reports that he cannot be his normal gregarious self, but notes that he would withdraw from behaving in ways stereotypically associated with being a good citizen (intervening in an incident). Moreover, there is a sense in which this withdrawal is bound up with his uncertainty about whether his behaviour would be perceived and received in the way it was intended. That is, his fear that the situation could be misconstrued has robbed him of his ability to act in a pro-social way – one that is in accordance with his own moral standards – with any degree of confidence.

In citing this last example, we do not mean to suggest that people will withdraw all of the time. Withdrawal is clearly something that people wrestle with and we end this section with a young convert (Interviewee 14) who expresses the dilemma well. First, she describes how she is aware of others' stares and explains how she typically responds with a smile. However, she then describes her ambivalence about such a response. On the one hand, she reports a concern that to smile might be to invite an interaction in which she is asked unwelcome questions about her faith. On the other hand, she reports her concern that in refusing to smile she may be unfairly judging others' stares.

Extract 11

Interviewee 14: You get stares and things but you always just smile and then sometimes it can get a bit stressful because you don't want to be so obvious all the time, and you just want to kind of push it in the background and people maybe not to ask you questions. Or you know, we just say that it's you know, it's from Allah. If he wants people to ask then they're gonna ask you and you have to be prepared for the questions. (...) But now it's just like I said, I don't like to think too badly of people and they might just be looking because they're curious and maybe want to know more and if I look horrible to them, they're not gonna approach me are they? So that's not nice on my part either.

In this young woman's reflections we see the complex weighing of these options. This illustrates further the burden involved in monitoring behaviour discussed above and how it impacts upon the possibility of simply being a *hijab*-wearing woman. It also illustrates the way in which spontaneity in interaction is diminished; even a smile is subject to reflection on its interactional significance. Moreover, it becomes clear that positive responses which invite interaction (and which could have positive outcomes) may be inhibited. For this interviewee, all this was particularly complex because she entertains the possibility that other people's stares may be a test of her religious identity (as she puts it "it's from Allah") which means that she has to struggle between what she knows to be right (a friendly smile) and what would make life easier (avoidance of any interaction). Thus, she really is torn between wanting to engage with others in the public realm and wanting to protect herself from negative experiences. Again, even if interaction is not avoided, it may not be easy or spontaneous.

Section 2b: Citizenship Activity: Voicing one's Rights

Another aspect of people's willingness to participate confidently in public spaces is their voicing of their rights and entitlements (Barnes et al., 2004). In the airport, people's confidence to voice their concerns about their treatment and how it violates their own sense of what is appropriate reflects their concerns over their relations with the airport authorities. As we saw in Extract 7, some reported a strong intention to publicly complain about their treatment. Yet, as we will see, others reported feeling unable to voice their concerns for fear that their complaints would not be judged those of a citizen but rather would be seen as confirming (in the eyes of the authorities) their problematic (and suspicious) identity.

Our first example comes from a male youth worker who spoke of an incident when a friend wearing Pakistani dress queried why he was stopped.

Extract 12

Interviewee 7: What did he do wrong? Nothing. He basically stood up for the rights that he can stand up for being a British citizen. (...) He asked one fundamental question, "Why are you stopping me?" And if that ticks the police off, it changes a life. And that puts a Muslim into a situation where he's fearful because I was really watching how I answered those questions.

Interviewer: How did you, in that moment how did you want to be able to respond?

Interviewee 7: I wanted to say some vile words, say you know, I am who I am, I am a British or a Scottish national and as far as I'm concerned three hundred people came off that plane, none of them stopped, I am no different to any one of those. I was never allowed to raise a voice and for me that still stays within me. And I would love to have been able to express that without the fear of actually being put into prison or something.

Interviewer: So you'd still like to be able to tell that story in a way?

Interviewee 7: Yeah. I mean I would love for that instance to happen where the people are waiting at (...) airport to be seated and for all the Scottish Muslims who went through this instance to be there and for me to blast out and say what I felt at that time.

This interviewee reports his strong desire to express himself and "say some vile words". Moreover, what he wishes to say is bound up with his identity as a citizen: He reports wanting to say "I am a British or Scottish national". However, he also reports feeling unable to speak because he would not be heard as a citizen and that his complaint might anger the authorities (in this case the police) and bring even worse treatment: as he puts it, if something

"ticks the police off, it changes a life". Again, it seems that in the airport his experience is such that he is constrained to act on terms that deny his own sense of his identity and the entitlements associated with it.

Other interviewees explained that they felt unable to voice their concerns and enact their citizenship through complaining about their treatment because the terms for their interaction with the authorities were not what they seemed at first sight. Consider for example Interviewee 20 who explained that he faced "crazy questions", such as "how many times do you go to the Mosque?". He argued that these were not to be taken at face value (as requests for information), but were actually designed to elicit a response that would be diagnostic of one's security risk:

Extract 13

Interviewee 20: They want to see how exactly you are going to react or act for example. It's a probing question just to see exactly how does he react? Where do his eyes go? What does he do with his body language? [The] focus is on your behaviour: are you being angry, are you being agitated, are you being nervous, are you being anxious. So silly questions to see your body language and that tells them what they want to know.

Here again, "silly questions" are asked as a test, and any expression of anger or resentment at one's treatment is judged likely to risk the further violation of one's sense of what is appropriate. Moreover, just as the questions from the authorities are inauthentic, so too is the interviewee's response: a managed performance of silence. That is, neither party's behaviour is authentic, to be taken at face value, and the result is that the interviewee's ability to complain is inhibited.

Others made the point that silence in the face of such treatment was a routine accommodation to others' power. Take for example Extract 14 where Interviewee 8 describes a situation where the non-Muslim work colleagues of her husband, witnessing such interactions, felt compelled to voice a strong sense of injustice, yet her husband did not:

Extract 14

Interviewee 8: He [her husband] didn't actually say anything, it was actually the people he was with who weren't Muslim who said, 'that wasn't right, that's not on, how come they stopped you?' You know it wasn't him that said anything, he just brushed it off and said, 'you know, look it doesn't matter, you get used to it.' You know what I mean?

Thus, her husband's silence in relation to his treatment is not because his treatment was unremarkable; quite the contrary and others were indignant on his behalf. Rather, his silence on his treatment reflects the routine nature of the misrecognition he experienced and his accommodation to it.

We conclude with a young woman (Interviewee 12) who, having described a distressing interaction at the airport, was asked "What did you want to do?". In her response we see many of the themes discussed: a general sense of inauthenticity and a sense of fear and of anger that cannot be expressed.

Extract 15

Interviewee 12: It's quite frustrating because obviously when you're in the middle of it, when you're in the middle of it you just have to kind of smile and go through the questions because you know you're telling the truth and as long as you're telling the truth nothing is going to happen to you because you know you've done nothing wrong.

Interviewer: Right, so you have confidence that nothing is going to happen to you?

Interviewee 12: You have confidence that nothing is going to happen to you because you know you're innocent. (...) When you're like finished, when you've gone to the other side you're like boiling because you think why do they have to do it? You know like they're checking people but you think why me, why do they have to do it to me? Why don't they stop the Scottish woman that went in front of me, do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: But you don't feel like you can challenge them on that?

Interviewee 12: No I can't. Not in the middle of it. Because you're kind of afraid to do that because you know that they've got more power than you. You're afraid that if you do that then they'll take you away and lock you up. That's what you're afraid of. (...)

Interviewer: So a while ago you said you felt confident if you answered the question that you'd be OK.

Interviewee 12: Yeah, if I answered the question. But I wouldn't like start shouting at them. I wouldn't start making a fight against them because the amount of times you see on the news innocent people and they'll arrest them and then a week later they're out again saying we won't charge you.

On the one hand, this young woman expresses confidence in her entitlement to be treated justly and believes that "as long as you're telling the truth nothing is going to happen to you because you know you've done nothing wrong". Accordingly, she describes how "you just have to kind of smile and go through the questions". Yet, she also explains that once the encounter is over ("when you've gone to the other side"), the experience is very different ("you're like boiling"). In part this is because of the opportunity for reflection ("why do they have to do it to me?"). But a key element is the sense of frustration at her differential treatment ("Why don't they stop the Scottish woman?") and her frustration at the sense of fear when interacting with powerful others ("I wouldn't start making a fight against them"). Again, the picture is of citizenship compromised.

Discussion

Although citizenship has typically been conceptualised in terms of individuals' rights and obligations in relation to the state, participation in public spaces has, from Aristotle to de Tocqueville, been considered central to the communal health of citizenry (Painter & Philo, 1995). Recently, as the concept of citizenship has broadened to include everyday practices of inclusion and exclusion, the usage of public space has become particularly prominent and encounters in public space reveal much about who can belong where and on what terms (Di Masso, 2012; Hopkins & Dixon, 2006).

Throughout our analysis we have observed that the ability of British Muslims to occupy the public space of an airport on their own terms is compromised. Moreover, we have argued that this is because the powerful are judged to be in a position to act on their constructions of the traveling public's identities, and make these assumptions count for those who pass through their doors. Our participants' responses to their experiences of misrecognition were diverse but involved physical and psychological retreat. Thus, in Section 1, we reviewed some of the stratagems employed to lower one's profile (e.g., averting others' gaze, changing one's gait) in the hope of slipping through public spaces unnoticed. People also reported withholding important information about themselves when they did interact such that their interactions were, from our participants' perspectives, in some sense inauthentic. Having seen how participants' concerns about the misrecognition of their identities were consequential in encouraging a desire to avoid attention (Section 1), we next considered how this impacted upon behaviours commonly associated with citizenship as civic engagement (Section 2). Here, we observed that some felt unable to connect

with others in genuinely positive ways – including intervening to resolve conflicts that arise. Research shows that a shared identity facilitates pro-social behaviour (e.g., [Drury, Cocking, & Reicher, 2009](#); [Pandey, Stevenson, Shankar, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2014](#); [Vezzali, Cadamuro, Versari, Giovannini, & Trifiletti, 2015](#); [Wakefield et al., 2011](#)); and that in order to help others, it is not enough that one identifies with them, but that one also anticipates being recognised as ingroup by them. So too, we explored the fears that some reported concerning the consequences that could arise if they were to question their treatment by the authorities. Again, the implications were clear: their psychological retreat in public space diminished their ability to enact the 'civic engagement' behaviours typically associated with citizenship.

Far from these responses being either uniform or straightforward, our data evinced some of the ambivalence experienced in such negotiations and thus illustrate the point that these strategies were never cost-free. Indeed, as some of our quotes show all too clearly, non-engagement is actually a difficult and complex accomplishment: those involved wrestled with dilemma after dilemma as to whether one can really be oneself in the airport (Extract 3), whether smiling is an appropriate response to another's stares (Extract 11), or whether one should be a good citizen and intervene (Extract 10), or complain over one's treatment (Extracts 12 and 15). Perhaps most crucially, our data suggest that where people do engage, the awareness that one's identity cannot be taken for granted may necessarily render that engagement inauthentic. That is to say, even where people resolved to 'be themselves' and to resist definitions that were not their own (Extract 7) this was reported as a self-conscious and reflective stance and not the relaxed, habitual experience of being one's authentic self.

All of this is psychologically burdensome and draining and all of this is testament to the importance of [Painter and Philo's \(1995\)](#) observation that the ability to occupy public space without compromising one's self-identity is an important element of everyday citizenship. Taken together, these materials hint at the psychological and social significance of being positioned by others on terms that are discrepant from one's own. They also point to the potential for social psychological analyses of encounters in public places to contribute much to the understanding of citizenship as it is practiced in everyday encounters and how it can be compromised in all manner of subtle ways.

This engagement with the domain of citizenship can also contribute to social psychological theory. We know individuals are active in claiming a range of right-bearing identities ([Barnes et al., 2004](#)) and in the performance of their social identities ([Cheryan & Monin, 2005](#)), seeking to exert control over how they are categorised and perceived. Indeed, we know individuals can act so as to elicit behaviour from others that confirms and affirms their self-conceptions ([Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004](#); [Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013](#); [Swann, 1987](#); [Swann & Giuliano, 1987](#)). However, we also need to recognise the constraints within which people operate. Through our examination of a space in which social relations are very clearly structured by power we find a broader lesson for social psychology. Although there is much to be gained from investigating behaviour through reference to individuals' psychological investments in various group identities, the ability to simply enact one's identities is the privilege of the powerful. That is, we need a social psychology that does not take such things for granted but attends to the experience of powerlessness and what this means for one's social identifications. Most obviously it reminds us that for minorities, identities cannot just be assumed or taken, but must also be conferred. Just as this understanding permeates contemporary citizenship research, so it must permeate social psychological theory.

Notes

i) Where material is excluded from a quoted extract this is denoted by the insertion of two rounded brackets, i.e., (...). Where explanations are added in the middle of a quoted extract they are placed inside square brackets, i.e., [explanation].

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Appendix: Characteristics of Interviewees Cited

Interviewee 7: Male, 28, youth worker

Interviewee 8: Female, 30, student

Interviewee 9: Male, 40s, businessperson

Interviewee 12: Female, 29, homemaker

Interviewee 14: Female, 27, student

Interviewee 15: Male, 21, student (focus group 1)

Interviewee 18: Male, 31, health professional (focus group 1)

Interviewee 19: Male, 50s, unknown (focus group 1)

Interviewee 20: Male, 50s, health professional (focus group 1)

Interviewee 23: Male, late 20s, professional